The Wonders of Japan

John Lovell

Howard University

Follow this and additional works at: http://dh.howard.edu/eng_fac

Part of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation


http://dh.howard.edu/eng_fac/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at Digital Howard @ Howard University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Department of English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Howard @ Howard University. For more information, please contact lopez.matthews@howard.edu.
FEATURES

THE WONDERS OF JAPAN

by JOHN LOVELL, JR.

Fulbright Lecturer, Osaka University of Foreign Studies, 1960-1961
(Professor of English, Howard University, Washington, D.C.)

Written for The Study of Current English

In Shakespeare’s play, The Tempest, Prince Ferdinand is shipwrecked on a strange island. Among other remarkable things he sees an extremely pretty girl. He says to her, “O, you wonder!” It turned out that the girl’s name was Miranda which means so glorious as to be wondered at, or wonderful. I was not shipwrecked; but after nine amazing months in Japan during which I have been in all four main islands, in every section and big city, in nearly every middle-sized city, and in hundreds of towns and villages, I can truthfully say, “Japan, you wonder!”

I say this without worrying about permanent conclusions. I am not one of those alien residents or travelers in Japan who are determined, by writing a book, to turn Japan into what I have made up my mind it ought to be, or into something different from everyone else’s impression. I merely wish to set down a few of the things that I have seen and felt which I classify as wonderful—sometimes because they are so different from the nearest similar thing in the West, sometimes because they have reached a notable stage of development and sometimes because they are just plain miraculous!

May I begin with travel. I am impressed first by map-making for short travel. I have never met a Japanese who did not answer my request for directions by drawing me a wonderful map. Westerners are so notoriously lacking in simple geography! Then, there is leave-taking, during which dozens of people come down to see off on the train one tomodachi. They stand solemnly waiting, hands behind backs, until the leaving bell sounds. When the train pulls out, they do a tremendous amount of bowing and waving, their bodies ranging from precise dignity to fast-moving supleness. Next is the passion for sight-seeing among the people. On Yashima plateau one April morning I counted 59 separate groups of sightseers—adults, students, small children—and never a foreigner among them. The same urge to see and appreciate the beautiful country—so utterly deserving of appreciation—I have found everywhere among the natives.

Especially do they love mountain tops, cable cars, ropeways,
FEATURES

have tasted the most delicious beef of my life—in Kobe, for one

place. In Hokkaido, I have seen cows, pigs, sheep, horses and other

outすと皆やたらにおじぎをしたり手を

振る——その恰好は勿体ぶった身ぶり

からしたらやかに速く体を動かすのまで

様々である。次には国民にみられる観

光熱である。八州高原である 4 月の

朝のこと私は数えて見た成人も、子供を混じえた 59 種の観光団体が来

ていたが外国人は一人もその中にいなかった。美しい国土を眺めめむるこ

とを望む気持ちが同じように国民の間に

どこへ行っても見られた。この国土は

まことに価値あるに値する美しい国土

である。

殊に国民は山の頂き、ケーブル・カ

ー、ロープウェー、城郭、塔、その他

の高所を愛する。この高所を好むと

いうことは象徴的なことであろうか、

私にはいずれとも言い難い。しかし観

光用でない段の列車やバスの旅でも

日本人は急からの景色を眺めようと争

って席を取り合う。時には節料を無視

してパスが止められ乗客に自由に風景

をめぐる機会が与えられる。日本人は

向う岸へつくためばかりに川を渡る国

民ではたしかにない。西洋人の中の

あるもののように、おきめすらずに

仕事に没入するような人種でもない。

日本人がいかにも価値する地方はどう

であろうか。それはいずれも驚異に満

ちたものである。『変化以外に永続す

るものなし』とはドイツの詩である

が、これには日本の地方ほどよくあて

はまるものはない。もちろん日本の国

土は五分の四が山地であるが、山の風

景は常に変化に富むものである。南本

州の富士山、北九州の小富士、およ

び

南北海道の北海道富士には天地の問

がある。この国土に住む者たちも然り。本

州では私は牛や馬はまれにしか見かけ

たことはないが、生涯で最も楽しい牛

肉を一筋所例を挙げると神戸で食べた

のである。北海道ではも牛肉、豚、馬

その他の動物を多數見かけた。九

州では荷車を引く牛牛を多く見た。植

物については、私の経験によれば本州

のどこかで見られるが一定の区域内

に止まっている。北海道では 6 月に

は殊に冬に最も大雪に見舞われた地方

で、植物が別のもとはよりも著しく変

化しきってあるものである。九州の千

石湾で私は段々になった台地の町（小

浜）を訪れた。そこは町の後が段々に

区切られていて各段に庭園があった。
fauna in abundance; in Kyushu, many oxen drawing carts. As for flora, my experience is that in Honshu it is everywhere present but stays within bounds. In Hokkaido during June, especially in regions struck in winter by the heaviest snows, it is lusher and more colorful than anywhere else. In Kyushu—on Chijiwa Bay—I saw a terraced town (Obama), with terraced sections behind the town and gardens on every terrace level. I said to myself that in future years when I come to Japan, I will probably see many things like this—reclaiming the land from the mountains. Also in Kyushu I saw green moss intermingled with other thatching on the thatched roofs.

For legendary pictures, however, nothing is more like being drawn on a post card than for you to stand at the edge of the planking in Hakodate harbor with the sun almost melted down.

If the land is well dressed, indeed so are the people. Some of the girls facetiously imitate the Ryukyu women (I am told) by placing their hair in various styles of "the beehive." Most of the children wear uniforms, some with ill grace. Some copy Western styles, especially French, with ferocity. A girl wearing her dress two inches above the knees will, when she sits, work hard to keep it pulled down, as though the dress itself had suddenly become innomodest. But most girls, and boys too, have a talent for looking neat and attractive, partly I suppose because they have manageable bodies. What will happen when they become tall and broad and gawky I do not know. It is almost a pity that they are being pulled away from their small, but comely, figures.
An interesting development is the passage of the Kimono in both men and women. In Kyushu, one still sees many kimono and tanzen in the streets; in the big cities of Honshu and Hokkaido, one sees almost none, except during the New Year’s season. It was my privilege to attend a kimono fashion show and to learn something of the great bunglesomeness involved in wearing kimono and sashes, for weddings and other formalities, and for everyday life. I learned that the kimono is dying partly because it slows down the wearer too much in the busy affairs of everyday life. This is a pity. When one has seen what color and style and...
human figure can do with kimono, both winter and summer, one strongly hopes that this delightful relic of a feudal age can be somehow preserved.

In the main Japanese cities, past meets present and future like hydrogen meets chlorine—with a mighty explosion. Tokyo, like all great cities of the world, is not a city really, only an illusion and a hodgepodge. And yet, one would never wish to have the greatest illusion of modern times rubbed out. Kyoto is part illusion, too, with its 1500 shrines and temples, and its vast universities and colleges. Osaka is not illusion—it is plain madness, busier than all the busy cities stirred together, with its great castle and fine temples and art galleries—even one modernistic temple—woefully out of place. And yet Osaka is the hub of industrial Japan and for all its mad appearance, I like it. Takamatsu, Kagoshima, Sendai, and Nagasaki I found very much to my liking mainly because my deepest moods link past and present indiscriminately. Kobe is home, set down like Longlegged Jack of the Isthmus between friendly mountains (particularly Rokko-san and Maya-san) and a ship-studded but glittering bay.

(To be concluded)
But the one city Japan must never lose is Nara. Nara is supreme. Nara is reality. No country can forget or eliminate its past as many Japanese, young and old, are trying this minute to do. Let the future Japan be built from Nara. Let the rich traditions of the past, so intensively preserved at Nara, be the foundations for the industry and science and culture and personality of the future. Then let Nippon be as modern as it pleases because then it will not be either sleepy traditionalism or bloated industrialism. It will be just right.

This topic leads easily to the wonders of Japanese education. Japan has the highest rate of literacy and the highest average daily school attendance in the world—both above 99%—and yet its educational future is full of question marks. There is little wrong with its teachers as long as it develops such as (I mention the giants I know best) Morisawa and Kata-yama at Osaka Gaidai, Osawa at Kanazawa, Yamaguchi at Fukui, Kashiwagura at Hokkaido, and Morioka at Kyushu. Some of its educational practices are most commendable, as for example, the practice of having hundreds of thousands of school children go on short and long tours and the practice of stand-up reading in bookstores by a phenomenal number of readers every day.

But the Japanese university student often seems to imagine himself in a wilderness. Some wonder if it is worthwhile to fight through the excruciating mazes of examinations and come out with degrees merely to settle in a trading house at very modest pay for the rest of their lives. The Japanese student thus seems doubtful as to his longrange objectives—he is too good a student and too fine a person to be without them. His demonstrations are, I think, a mark of his confusion and of his determination.
to be secure in an unsteady world. When he fully decides on cultural goals worthy of his superior weapons of brains and character, he will be without superior anywhere. As long as he has not decided, he often uses his great brain power to avoid persistent study and still to simulate the results. But I have seen enough of him to have faith in him. I believe he will walk out of this wilderness in a few years.

The whole story of gainful employment in Japan, however, is a wonder. I marvel not only at the employment of university students of mighty intellect, but also at the employment of those who did not reach university, most, I suppose, eliminated along the way. I am told that girl attendants on the bus—who sometimes burst into song as part of their instructive routine—must sometimes qualify when the applications are 50 to 100 times the number of the positions. These jobs, and other jobs like them, require managerial ability and sales personality.

It seems, however, that practically everyone in Japan is employed, though I know there are unemployment statistics. I see a dozen waitresses in a restaurant where at home I would see (flitting by) two or three. I see beautiful girls in brilliant uniforms engaged in the gentle practice of wiping off the bannisters alongside the escalators, bowing meanwhile and thanking the customers (even though they didn't buy anything) in super-honorific tones. I see women helping their men—working, working the rice fields, loading cement, rowing boats in mid-bay. I see elderly people lugging huge furōshihi, acting as delivery trucks. The people of Japan are busy, busy, busy—all day, seven days a week, and during nearly all holidays.

In Japan also are foreigners, and not all of them are as beautiful as the natives. Some are determined toforeignize the country, willy-nilly. Some complain because English is not everywhere spoken, or western dishes not everywhere served, or beds not present in ryokans. Some rely on guides or on living in Tokyo instead of roughing it through the real Japan.

Many foreigners, though, are quite dedicated. Facing up to the problems of communication, they gradually learn the language and learn to live with the people. It is beside the point that they are not fully accepted—many Japanese are not accepted by other Japanese, many Americans not by other Americans. The major sin is to undervalue the Japanese power of perception and to offer less than one's best. It is a fine thing that Western countries are thinking more and more highly of Japan as friend, as neighbor, and as ally. This will mean that foreign service employees, semi-official visitors,
and tourists will be of higher quality in the future and will elicit more electrical responses. It is a fine thing that so many superior Japanese are going abroad for a multiplicity of reasons. One—a Gaidai instructor named Oi-san—is accompanying me back to Howard University for a year to study American drama. All such interchanges will add to the wonders of Japan.

And last we come to the wonders of the Japanese personality. The Japanese are entitled to their prejudices and peculiarities, if they will grant these privileges on a universal basis. As the Japanese come to know more and to be better known, prejudices on every side will decrease; but it is to be hoped that discriminating tastes will remain. No one can match the Japanese in two horns of a certain paradox: clannishness on one side friendliness and courtesy on the other. They are at their worst when they begin a sentence with "We Japanese" because then they usually describe a trait common to most human beings. They are at their best in conversation, generously using varied tones and artful

---

MANNERS FOR LANGUAGE STUDENTS

By

CHARLES E. WOODSON

During the year I have been in Japan I have had many experiences with Japanese concerning the English language, all the way from the boy in Kyoto Station who asked me the time and then was too afraid to wait for an answer, to the Japanese girl who read some things I had written and corrected the spelling and grammar for me.

I know that nearly every Japanese student would like to speak with foreigners, so I, as a foreign visitor to Japan, wish to offer some suggestions about manners and language.

MEETING PEOPLE

First of all, when you meet a person who appears to be lost, don’t say, “Where are you going?” While the Japanese equivalent of this is quite polite, to us this is a very blunt statement. When someone says this to me, I feel like replying, “It is none of your business.” A much more polite sentence for you to say is, “May I help you?”

If you should be fortunate enough to be sitting (or standing) beside a foreigner, it is permissible to ask him (or her) if you may speak to him (or her). Don’t say, “May I practice my English on you?” That gives us the feeling that we are being experimented upon. I suggest you say: “May I speak with you?” This is polite and will nearly always get a favorable reply.

But then your real test comes. Please, please, please have something to say.

WHAT TO SAY

You have no idea how boring it is to hear over and over again, “Where are you from?” “I am studying English.” “I have 2 sisters.” Many people will be kind to you when you speak in such a way, but you are taxing them. Try these ideas. “Do you know that next Tuesday is Children’s Festival in Japan?” You will likely get a “no”, then you can explain to them. “Have you visited the X Temple in our city? It is very famous among us Japanese. In May we have our Spring Festival....”

To a beginner such conversations may sound difficult but truly they are not. You can write them out and practice them beforehand if you wish. Once you have learned a short speech about some important thing in your city, you can use it over and over.

If you should meet me (or someone else interested in learning Japanese) you can make yourself very popular by offering a Japanese lesson.
pantomime even when talking among themselves.

The Japanese personality is gloriously expressed in the Japanese bath, especially the “multitude bath.” It is not the fact that dozens, even hundreds of people, bathe together that I find most wonderful, although this fact is wonderful enough. The superior wonder is in the fact that in this mighty crowd each individual emerges as a special person. The Japanese are far ahead of the world in bathing. Americans think baths are for cleanliness; some other countries that they are for relaxation, style, or society; the Japanese take all these as a beginning. They know that transcendentally, hot baths are for discovering who you really are, through philosophical musing, overtly, in a crowd. In the course of this self-discovery, they are never curious about the next man. Or woman.

The Japanese have great faith in the following things: the supremacy of the male child, the uselessness of hats, cement buildings, wheels (especially the manhood that comes up through the seat of a motorbike), the homeliness of

You might launch into the subject by saying, “Have you studied the Japanese language?” Then offer to teach a few words. Sayonara, X-o kudasai, ikura, ichi, ni, san, etc. are very useful, even to the tourist. We will be very grateful for the lesson and you will have the opportunity to practice your English.

I once received a card from a Japanese student with the Japanese system of numbers, the 2 systems of pronunciation in Romaji and the western system on it. This short lesson was very helpful to me and I have long been grateful to him. If he would have written his name and address on the back of the card he would have long ago received a letter of thanks and perhaps an invitation to visit my home.

But, please remember one very important thing when dealing with these partly bilingual people. Always reply in the language spoken to you.

Nothing exasperates me more than when I speak in Japanese to someone and they stammer back in English or hold up fingers in some strange would-be international language.

You will often meet people who can not fully understand your reply. In that case you should reply in the language spoken to you and then repeat the same thing in English. Then if that person replies to you in English, you may speak only in English to him.

In general remember to look at your conversation from the foreigners point of view. He is not interested in repeating trite things, but he probably is very interested in learning more about Japan and the Japanese. You are seeking a free English lesson from him. You should give him something in return, and the best thing you have to offer is information about Japan.

NEGATIVE QUESTIONS

The meaning of a negative question is much different in Japanese than in English. When visiting Japanese homes I have often been asked a question like: “Won’t you eat supper now?”

I reply: “Yes, of course.” Then I am very surprised to be told the meal is not yet ready. The person wished to speak to me in the most polite manner possible but to me this negative question carried the implication of a command. To me he was saying: “You should eat supper now; if you do not, please explain to me why you do not wish to do so.”

A much better sentence would be: “Would you like to eat supper now?” (Unless you actually mean to suggest that I should eat now or explain my delay.)

This is not a complete list. But, I have mentioned some things which I think are important. You and the people you meet can add to this list.

“I’ve enjoyed speaking with you. I hope we meet again soon. Good-by.”
television (alas!), the need for speed and pushing, the ability to relax (to take off one's shoes and to sleep in any vehicle or to sleep standing up), the monopolies which serve them, an authoritative foreigner, and (thank the good Lord!) art in every corner of life. At Nakamura's Department Store in Nago-ya I saw a glassware exhibit and marveled, among other things, at the art of preservation which retained glass pieces for 20 centuries. In Kagoshima and in Karatsu I saw marvelous art objects hundreds of years old, but better than that, I have seen them in peoples' homes. I love to enter a home or a taxicab where I am certain there will be one or more beautiful flowers. I love to see my insignificant purchase wrapped with inevitable color in even an unpretentious Japanese shop.

I am fascinated by girls who cover their mouths when they laugh. I am even more fascinated by friends who reach over and continue to fill up each other's sake cups or beer glasses, without request. I am fascinated by Japanese faces. There is every kind of face in Japan, but more happy faces than I see at home. Usually, they are not poker faces, as some have declared. Even the fine control of face muscles accentuates rich tones of meaning and in this choir of meaning is wonder and curiosity about the next move or the eventual outcome. If these tones were blurred, the eyes will show the secret alone. The brown eyes are always expressive. They sharply and concisely summarize. They challenge. They demand a worthwhile competition.

And so you have a tiny sample from my vast collection of the wonders of Japan. You have heard nothing of the Japanese theatre since I am reporting elsewhere—and will report for years—on the 100 Japanese plays I have seen in nine months and the dozens of wonderful people and things I have met on the Japanese stage. When I return to America, my mind will be a museum treasuring my Japan.

E.P.S.